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THE NEW AVENGERS
ILLUMINATI
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THE NEW AVENGERS
ILLUMINATI

The Illuminati is a secret organization comprised of several of the world's most powerful heroes: Sorcerer Supreme Doctor Strange; Black Bolt, King of the Inhumans; Charles Xavier, founder of the X-Men and mutant rights activist; Reed Richards, founding member of the Fantastic Four; Namor, the Sub-Mariner, Ruler of Atlantis; and Iron Man, founding member of the Avengers.

These six men have worked together to shape the superhuman world. To keep the trust between the group members, the Illuminati's existence has been kept secret from everyone, including the members' teammates and families.

How and what they've done together has remained a mystery...until now...

Years ago, Thanos, the Mad Titan, gathered the Infinity Gems--stones that possessed unimaginable power--and attempted to use them to create an offering to his beloved Death by killing half the beings in the universe. After Thanos was defeated, powerful cosmic forces ruled that the Gems would no longer work in concert with each other, and they were scattered throughout the universe.

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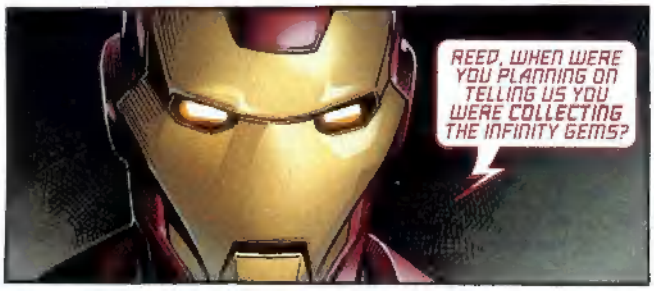
SEVERAL MONTHS AGO...
THIS...IS AN INFINITY GEM.
THERE ARE SIX GEMS ALTOGETHER.
EACH WIELDS COSMIC-LEVEL POWER OF A SPECIFIC TYPE.
WHEN BROUGHT TOGETHER, THEY GIVE THE PERSON WIELDING THAT POWER INFINITE CONTROL OVER SPACE, TIME AND MATTER...
...OVER THE ENTIRE KNOWN UNIVERSE.
THIS IS THE POWER GEM.
MR. FANTASTIC
LEADER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
BLACK BOLT
KING OF THE INHUMANS.
NAMOR
RULER OF ATLANTIS.
AND HOW IS IT, DOCTOR RICHARDS, THAT YOU HAVE ONE?
AND WHY THE HELL DID YOU BRING IT HERE?
TONY STARK.
THE INVINCIBLE
IRON MAN
DOCTOR
STRANGE
MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS.
PROFESSOR CHARLES XAVIER
LEADER OF THE UNCANNY X-MEN.

SHE-HULK TOOK IT FROM TITANIA. SHE THEN BROUGHT IT TO ME FOR SAFE-KEEPING.
ONE OF SHE-HULK'S BAD GUYS GOT THEIR HANDS ON AN INFINITY GEM?
AND IT GOT ME THINKING THAT--
ONE OF SHE-HULK'S?!
WELL, THAT JUST MAKES ME NAUSEOUS.
GET IT OUT OF HERE.
IT GOT ME THINKING THAT THERE ARE FIVE MORE OF THESE SCATTERED ABOUT THE UNIVERSE.
AND EVERY TIME THANOS OR ANYONE HAS QUESTED TO GATHER THEM TOGETHER, IT HAS ALWAYS--ALWAYS--BROUGHT THIS PLANET NOTHING BUT PAIN.
POWERS GREATER THAN OUR OWN USE THESE GEMS AND US AS BARGAINING CHIPS IN A POWER STRUGGLE THAT WE HAVE NO WAY OF FIGHTING AGAINST.
WE ARE ALIVE TODAY... BECAUSE OF DUMB LUCK.
BLACK BOLT SAYS HE WAS LED TO BELIEVE THE INFINITY GEMS COULD NO LONGER WORK TOGETHER IN UNISON.
AND I SAY TO HIM: SAYS WHO?
EXACTLY.
I WAS THERE WITH DOCTOR STRANGE DURING THANOS' LATEST STUNT WITH HIS INFINITY GAUNTLET.
AND I CAN TELL YOU-- THE DANGER OF THESE GEMS IS OH SO VERY REAL.
A DANGER THAT, I THINK, WE MUST CONTAIN BEFORE IT EVER HAPPENS AGAIN.
WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE WE DO?
I PROPOSE WE QUICKLY AND QUIETLY FIND ALL SIX OF THE INFINITY GEMS.

THE INFINITY GAUNTLET?!
YOU HAVE THE INFINITY GAUNTLET?
AND TWO MORE INFINITY GEMS?


REED, WHEN WERE YOU PLANNING ON TELLING US YOU WERE COLLECTING THE INFINITY GEMS?

UH, NOW.

WHEN I WAS GIVEN THE POWER GEM, I STARTED INVESTIGATING...
I DISCOVERED THAT THE GEMS--AND I NEVER KNEW THIS--BUT NO MATTER HOW FAR APART THE GEMS ARE, THEY ACTUALLY SPEAK TO ONE ANOTHER.
THEY MAY BE ALIVE.
THAT'S HOW I FOUND THE OTHER TWO, BUT WITH EACH GEM I RECOVERED, THE LEVEL OF-OF DIFFICULTY INCREASED.

FINALLY, IT BECAME MORE THAN I WAS COMFORTABLE WITH HANDLING ALONE AND I--
STOP! STOP IT!
YOU'RE JUST A HUMAN. JUST A MAN.
HOW DARE YOU EVEN ATTEMPT THIS?!

HOW DARE YOU RISK THE--
THE RISK IS NOT TRYING TO FIND THEM. THE RISK IS LETTING OTHERS--
EVEN IF SOMEONE MANAGES TO FIND AN INFINITY GEM, THEY ARE NEVER ABLE TO HOLD ONTO IT FOR VERY LONG.
THE ODDS AGAINST ANYONE MANAGING TO ASSEMBLE ALL SIX GEMS AGAIN--
IT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE.
YES!
TWICE WE HAVE FACED THAT VERY SITUATION AND TWICE WE HAVE DEFUSED IT.
THE LAST TIME THE GEMS WERE COLLECTED, I CEASED TO EXIST.
SO I'M SORRY IF I SEEM OVERLY CONCERNED.
IF YOU WANT TO LEAVE, LEAVE.
BUT THE IDEA BEHIND US GATHERING TOGETHER WAS TO ADDRESS SITUATIONS EXACTLY LIKE THIS.
NOW, BRACE YOURSELVES...
THIS IS WHEN THINGS, AS MY BROTHER-IN-LAW LIKES TO SAY, GET "A LITTLE WEIRD."
REED? ARE YOU--
--OKAY?

HOLY--
WHERE HAVE WE GONE?
WE HAVEN'T GONE ANYWHERE.
I ASKED THE GEMS TO SHOW US WHERE THE OTHERS ARE.
I BELIEVE THAT IS THE MIND GEM.
THIS IS CONJECTURE, BUT IT LOOKS AS IF IT HAS SLIPPED FROM THE UNIVERSE AS WE PERCEIVE IT AND HAS LODGED ITSELF INTO WHAT WE COULD ONLY REFER TO AS THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS.
THERE! THAT MUST BE THE REALITY GEM.
IT SEEMS TO SIT AT THE ACTUAL EDGE OF REALITY ITSELF.
AND THE TIME GEM, WELL, THAT'S EVEN A BIT TRICKIER.
HOW DO I SAY THIS IN LAYMAN'S TERMS...IT SEEMS TO BE ADRIFT IN TIME.
BUT I THINK, ONCE I GET CONTROL OF THE OTHER INFINITY GEMS, I CAN USE THEM TO REACH THE TIME GEM.
WE.
HMM?
YOU SAID "I" AND I THINK YOU MEANT "WE."
YES. OF COURSE.

XAVIER'S ACADEMY FOR GIFTED YOUNGSTERS.
HEADQUARTERS OF THE X-MEN.
I AM VERY UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THIS...
YOU'VE MADE THAT VERY CLEAR, NAMOR.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU NEED ME HERE FOR.

YOU'RE HERE FOR MORAL SUPPORT.
IS THAT MOCKERY?
IT'S SARCASM. YOU'RE MUSCLE, NAMOR. YOU'RE HERE IN CASE THINGS GET ROUGH.
I'M HERE BECAUSE RICHARDS DOESN'T WANT ME NEAR HIS LAB...OR HIS WIFE.
AND YOU SHOULD HONOR THAT.
STEPHEN?
READY, CHARLES.
READY WITH WHAT? WHAT ARE WE DOING?
DOCTOR STRANGE IS OUR ANCHOR.

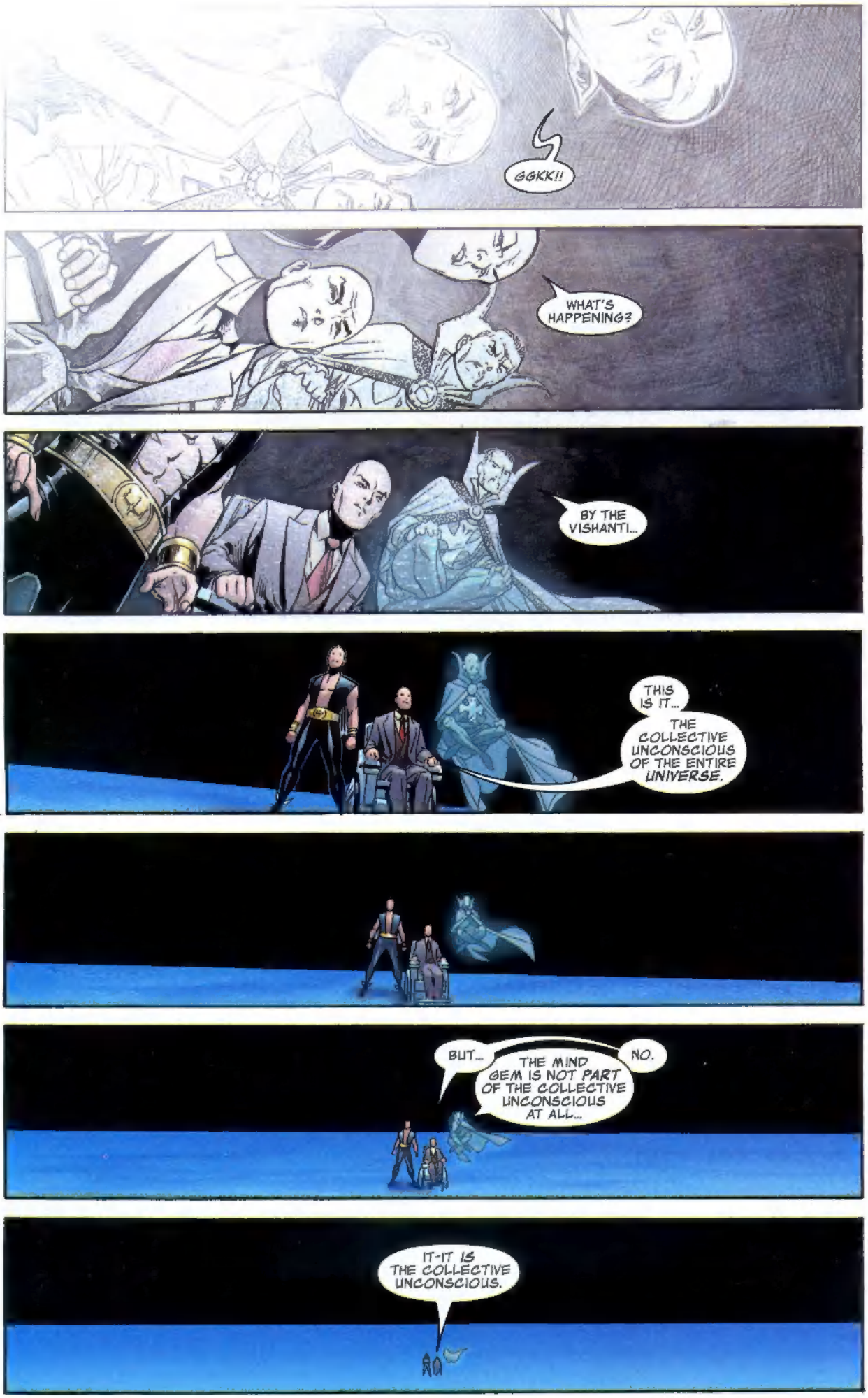
FINE! DON'T OVEREXPLAIN IT. LET'S JUST DO THIS AND GET IT OVER WITH.
HIS ASTRAL FORM, WHILE TIED TO MY PSYCHIC PROJECTIONS, CAN BRING US BACK TO THIS POINT--

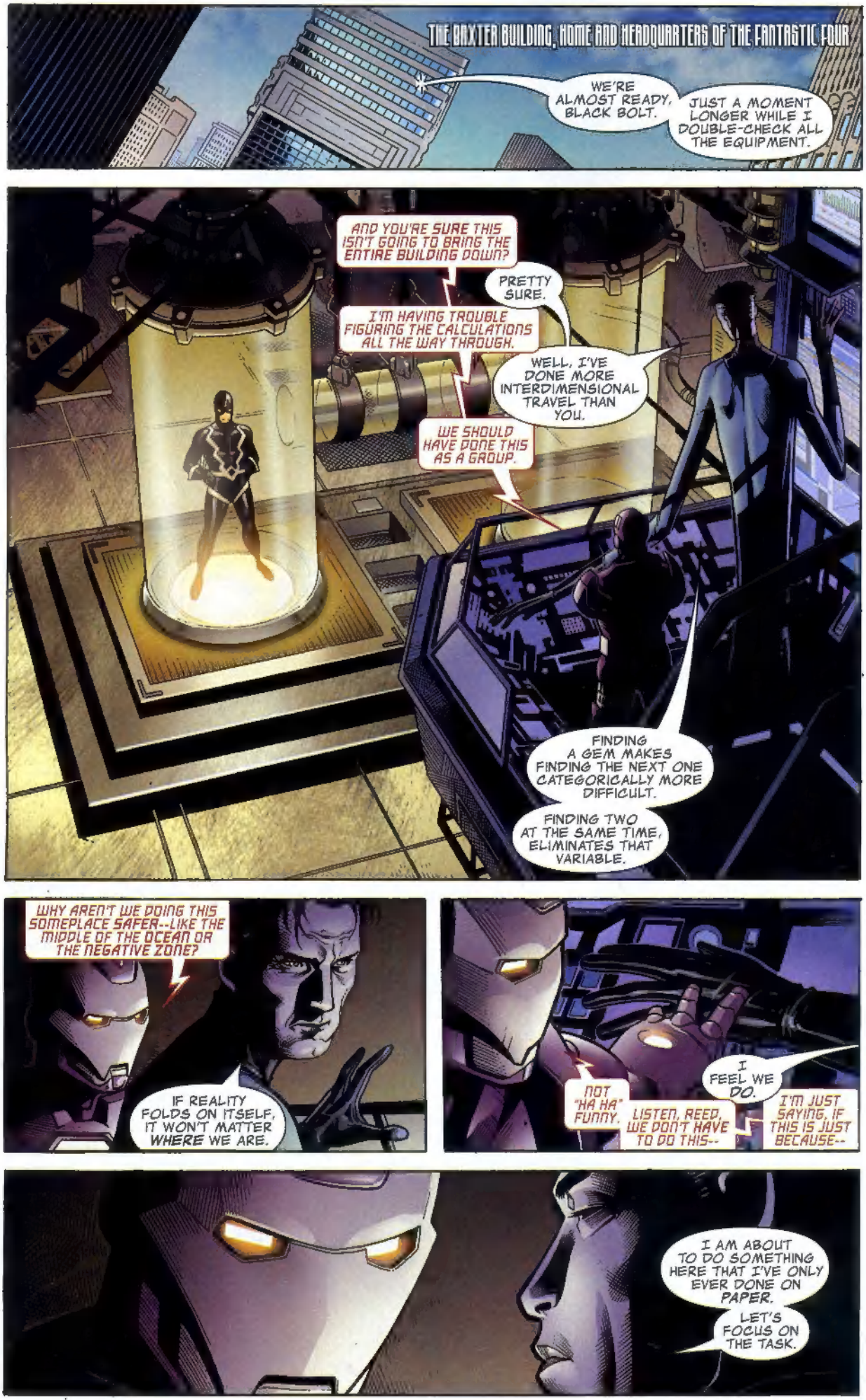
THE UNIVERSAL COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS. THIS SHOULD BE... EDUCATIONAL.

SOMETHING IS HAPPENING.
YES. I HAVE WRAPPED MY OWN CONSCIOUSNESS AROUND YOURS AND DOCTOR STRANGE'S--
HOLD ON--

WHAT WILL THAT DO, EXACTLY?
IF WE'RE LUCKY, IT WILL GIVE US ACCESS TO THE UNCONSCIOUS THOUGHTS AND DREAMS OF THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE.

AND IF WE ARE UNLUCKY?
JUST...
CLEAR YOUR MIND...


GGKK!!
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
BY THE VISHANTI...
THIS IS IT...
THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS OF THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE.
BUT...
THE MIND GEM IS NOT PART OF THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS AT ALL...
NO.
IT-IT IS THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS.


THE BAXTER BUILDING, HOME AND HEADQUARTERS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR
WE'RE ALMOST READY, BLACK BOLT.
JUST A MOMENT LONGER WHILE I DOUBLE-CHECK ALL THE EQUIPMENT.
AND YOU'RE SURE THIS ISN'T GOING TO BRING THE ENTIRE BUILDING DOWN?
PRETTY SURE.
I'M HAVING TROUBLE FIGURING THE CALCULATIONS ALL THE WAY THROUGH.
WELL, I'VE DONE MORE INTERDIMENSIONAL TRAVEL THAN YOU.
WE SHOULD HAVE DONE THIS AS A GROUP.
FINDING A GEM MAKES FINDING THE NEXT ONE CATEGORICALLY MORE DIFFICULT.
FINDING TWO AT THE SAME TIME, ELIMINATES THAT VARIABLE.
WHY AREN'T WE DOING THIS SOMEPLACE SAFER--LIKE THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN OR THE NEGATIVE ZONE?
IF REALITY FOLDS ON ITSELF, IT WON'T MATTER WHERE WE ARE.
I FEEL WE DO.
NOT "HA HA" FUNNY.
LISTEN, REED, WE DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS--
I'M JUST SAYING, IF THIS IS JUST BECAUSE--
I AM ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING HERE THAT I'VE ONLY EVER DONE ON PAPER.
LET'S FOCUS ON THE TASK.

BLACK BOLT... SPEAK.
ACTIVATING AMPLIFICATION DEVICES.
REED?
FOCUSING SOUND-WAVE ENERGIES.
REED?
YES...THE READINGS ARE RIGHT.
GOOD LORD, THE POWER OUTPUT IS INCREDIBLE...
BETTER THAN I HAD HOPED.
I CAN'T BELIEVE HE HOLDS IN THAT MUCH POWER.
WE'RE DOING IT, TONY.
WE'RE DOING IT!
IS IT JUST ME, OR IS THE WHOLE BUILDIN' SHAKIN'?
REED'S IN HIS LAB. OF COURSE THE BUILDING IS SHAKING.
IS THAT WHAT A HOLE IN REALITY IS SUPPOSED TO LOOK LIKE?
I IMAGINE IF WE LOOK THROUGH THAT WE COULD SEE THE VERY EDGE OF... WHAT IS.
"WHAT IS."
OF COURSE, WE'D PROBABLY GO COMPLETELY INSANE...
ARE YOUR ARMOR'S SENSORS PICKING ANYTHING UP?
UH...
ACTUALLY, YES, THEY ARE.
WHOA. IS THAT RIGHT?

AN OCEAN.
AN OCEAN MADE OF CRYSTAL?
SO WHAT DO YOU THINK, CHARLES?
NONE OF US EXPECTED THE MIND GEM TO BE SO...
ENCOMPASSING.
IT'S BEAUTIFUL.
I DO NOT THINK IT IS AS LARGE AS IT APPEARS.
IN FACT, I THINK IT IS EXACTLY AS ONE IMAGINES IT.
AHHH...I SEE YOUR LINE OF THINKING.
WE IMAGINED THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS AS A PHYSICAL PLACE--A DESTINATION.
AND SUCH THOUGHTS INVOKE, EVEN SUBCONSCIOUSLY, SIZE AND MASS.
EXACTLY. WE THOUGHT WE WERE GOING SOMEPLACE BIG--
AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHERE WE HAVE GONE.
SO IF PERCEPTION IS REALITY, THEN--
GENTLEMEN...
WHAT ON EARTH?
IT MOVES LIKE WATER, BUT...
THERE'S SOMETHING DOWN THERE.
NAMOR!
GET THE PROFESSOR TO SAFETY!
KRAK!
GHNN!

WELL... THAT WASN'T SO BAD.
WARNING! STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY FAILING!
KRRKK KRRK
OH NO.
TONY!
WARNING! WARRRRIIIIAAAAA!
STAY BACK, I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPEN-- AAHHHHH!
RICHARDS!
I THOUGHT THE IRON MAN ARMOR WOULD PROTECT YOU FROM THE REALITY RIFT, BUT--
YOU HAVE TOOOAAGGHH SEND IT BACK!
OH NO. IT'S THE GEM.
A-REE-AEEEEEEED!! TEEELLL HEEELP-P-P...

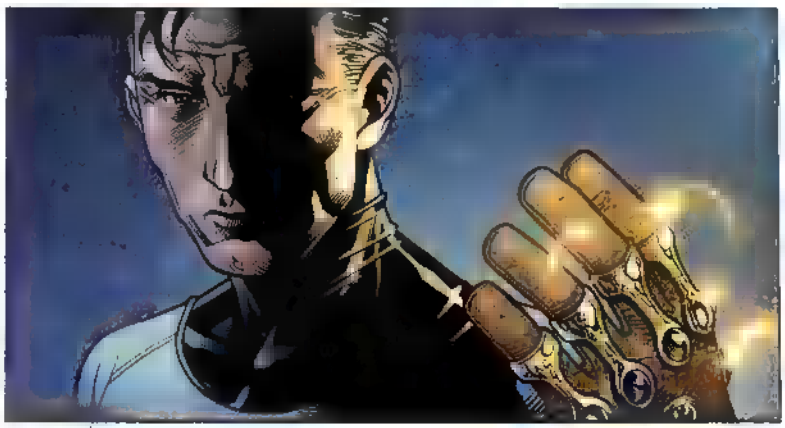
NAMOR! STOP!
YOU SAID THAT IN THIS PLACE PERCEPTION IS REALITY!
THEN THIS PART MAY [redacted] MY FAULT.
KACHOMP!
NOOOO!

BLACK BOLT! GET OUT OF HERE! THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO!!
YOU'RE RIGHT!
GET OUT OF HERE! GET MY FAMILY OUT OF THIS BUILDING!
I CAN'T LET THIS BE HOW IT ENDS!
PLEASE...

AARRGGHH!
DANTI TURUNANTI SPILIN!!!
FAWHAM

PLEASE WORK...
SHOULD WE GO UP THERE?

GUH...
GNUH...



WELL...
LET'S HOPE THE OTHERS ARE HAVING A BETTER TIME.

I HOPE THIS...IS AN INFINITY GEM.
THE MIND GEM...
REED?
AMAZING.
VERY NICE.
UH.
MY SENSORS ARE REALLY HITTING OVERLOAD!
WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?
I DON'T--
TAKE OFF THE GLOVE.
NOW.

IS THAT THE--?
THE TIME GEM.
THE FIVE GEMS TOGETHER JUST... SUMMONED THE LAST ONE.
OKAY, I'M ABOUT DONE WITH THIS.
THE GAUNTLET... BROUGHT IT HOME.
TAKE IT OFF NOW.
REED?
REED, TAKE OFF THE GLOVE.
RICHARDS, I WILL TAKE IT FROM YOU WITH MY DYING BREATH IF YOU DON'T--
OH MY--

REED RICHARDS...I EXPECTED MORE FROM YOU.
THE WATCHER!
UATU...
MY JOB IS TO WATCH AND RECORD THE UNIVERSE'S DEFINING EVENTS.
AND NOW I FIND MYSELF HERE, WATCHING THIS.
I HAVE BROKEN THE CODE OF MY EXISTENCE COUNTLESS TIMES FOR YOU.
BECAUSE I BELIEVED IN YOU.
I BELIEVED, GIVEN A CHANCE, THAT YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE CAN ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING.
AND THIS IS WHAT YOU DO?
REED, TAKE IT OFF.
MAN WAS NOT MEANT TO WIELD THIS KIND OF POWER.
IT'S BEYOND YOUR UNDERSTANDING.
YOU WILL DESTROY EVERYTHING.

IT DIDN'T WORK.
WHAT DIDN'T WORK?
I THOUGHT I COULD WILL THE GAUNTLET TO CEASE TO EXIST.
IT DIDN'T WORK.
IT WON'T LET ME.
TAKE IT.
I CANNOT.
YOU WELL KNOW THAT.
PLEASE...
I CANNOT. AND NEITHER CAN YOU.
NO ONE BEING OF ANY KIND IN THIS UNIVERSE... SHOULD POSSESS ALL OF THE GEMS.
I AGREE.
ESPECIALLY A HUMAN.
I AGREE.

BECAUSE I ALSO BELIEVE...
...THAT GIVEN A CHANCE...
...THAT WE...
...CAN ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING.
GIVEN THE CHANCE.

EACH ONE OF US WILL HAVE A GEM. AND NEVER *EVER* SHALL WE USE THEM.
YOU WILL HIDE THEM FROM EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE.
WE WILL BE THEIR PROTECTORS.
NONE OF US WILL KNOW WHERE THE OTHERS HAVE HIDDEN THEM.
IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO KEEP THEM SAFE.

THIS WAS NOT YOUR DECISION TO MAKE, RICHARDS.
I FEAR WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO YOU ONCE YOU'VE BEEN DISCOVERED.
BUT I *AM* PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL YOU WERE *STRONG* ENOUGH OF MIND TO NOT GIVE IN TO THE GAUNTLET'S TEMPTATIONS.

NEXT: SECRET WARS!